

# NOTES from FEE

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THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.  
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## LOOK FIRST TO THE THINKING

YE OLDE grist mill was turning out nothing but weed seed meal and the customers were unhappy. Some agitated for a new management. Others, knowing that the machinery was in disrepair because of long inattention, insisted that its restoration be the first order of business. There were a few, however, who pointed out that if only weed seed were put into the mill, only weed seed meal could come out as grist. These few argued that feeding into the mill a raw material superior to weed seed should be given first consideration.

Today, in the USA, Ye Olde Federal Mill is turning out socialistic grist. Many of us have no stomach for this product, and we agitate for a variety of remedies.

Some of our persuasion, who are politically oriented, insist that a change in the governing personnel be the first order of business. They observe socialists in the political chairs and reflect on how much better it would be if only those of our own choosing were to occupy these seats of power. As a consequence, they emphasize putting "the right men" into public office.

Others of our persuasion, who also are politically oriented, give top priority to a repair of the governmental structure. They quite accurately observe, for instance, that the foundation of the federal mill has broken down. Gone is the base on which it originally rested, namely, "All men are endowed by their Creator

with certain unalienable rights." The Constitution and Bill of Rights have been warped into shapes which the builders would never recognize as their handiwork. The tax apparatus is cluttered with inequities. Government is burning up the peoples' income at an accelerating rate. To keep itself running in its over-extended role, it is inflating and thus eroding the medium of exchange. Its socialistic grist bears ever-increasing price tags; and the people are compelled to take the grist whether or not they want it. Confronted with "a long train of abuses and usurpations," these libertarian mechanics see repairing the machinery as the first order of business: constitutional amendments, repeal of outrageous statutes, new laws to nullify bad ones, and so on.

THE politically oriented, however, do not have the libertarian field all to themselves. Among those of us who dislike socialism and who agitate for remedies are the educationally oriented. Though perhaps no person is oriented exclusively one way or the other, there does exist an honest difference of opinion as to where the emphasis should be placed, what logically and practically should come first.

Again, I wish to present the case for the educational emphasis. For, as some of us see it, grist mills grind what is put into them, be it #1 hard red winter wheat or weed seed. Sure, we prefer a mill with competent operators.

And, just as surely, an efficient mill is preferable to one with a misshapen millstone and a wobbly waterwheel. But the fact remains that the grist from no mill can be of higher quality than the raw material put into it.

What is being put into the USA's 1959 federal mill? Intellectual weed seed! Socialistic thoughts! What is being fed into the mill is representative of *what we are* and that is all there is for grinding.

Unless we can in some manner contribute to bettering *what we are* — unless we can, as an absolute minimum, attract individuals away from collectivist thinking as to the function of government — we might as well forget the whole thing.

We cannot even hope for better men in government than we now have, assuming no better thinking than we now have, and assuming free elections.

Let us imagine a complete reconstruction of the federal machinery along sound legal and organizational lines. It would make no significant difference. The new mill would continue to grind only what is put into it.

**M**ORE is wrong with the political emphasis, however, than its futility. If this approach were simply futile — without any accomplishment at all — we could let the matter pass. But it inflicts a positive damage to whatever extent it diverts attention from the educational emphasis. The political approach, plausible and popular as it is — particularly among businessmen — robs the all-important educational approach of the most competent talents in the land by focusing these talents on efforts to cure what are at best mere effects.

Perhaps this whole question would be better resolved in our minds were we to realize that it was not the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights which made America what it was. These remarkable

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documents were but formalizations of remarkable thinking. It was the remarkable thinking of a few men of superlative stature, and the following they gained, which accounted for the America that was. Later, when the thinking became inferior, these formalizations correspondingly lost their meaning. Let our thinking continue to degenerate and these docu-

ments will be only parchments bearing noble ideas, but as meaningless as the cuneiform cones of Sumer now on display in the Louvre. Mere relics!

**T**HERE is in America today no lack of potential leadership for improved thinking. In instance after instance over the past thirty years,

I have observed men and women of uncommon intellectual and spiritual stature expending their energies in fruitless attempts to change the political reflections of socialistic thinking. They were largely lost to the cause of freedom by their error in emphasis.

On the other hand, over the same period, I have observed ever so many individuals of seemingly lesser potentialities actually attract others into a reversal of their socialistic thinking. They have done this simply by concentrating on the development of their own powers-to-understand-and-to-explain. They have become sources or wellsprings of the freedom philosophy, for others do, in fact, seek their counsel. Now, let the potentially great emulate these methods of the near great, let them concentrate on the educational approach, let them put first things first, let them focus their attentions on self-realization, and we shall witness a reversal of present trends. The solution, in my view, is that simple and, of course, that difficult. For, what is more alluring and less sensible than the project of reforming another adult? And what is less alluring and more sensible than the project of perfecting self?

**F**INALLY, one need have no concern at all about the quality of men in public office or the condition of the federal mechanism and its statutes once the thinking is right. Public figures and governmental machinery are but effects, reflections, echoes of leadership thinking, whatever that thinking happens to be. Improve the thinking and these hoped-for effects will follow as naturally and as spontaneously as light comes from the rising sun. Therefore, an eye to one's own thinking, to one's own understanding and exposition of freedom, is what should be emphasized — or, so it seems to those who are educationally oriented.



## THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

A FEELING OF HOPELESSNESS is the straw that could break the back of the freedom movement — for freedom will never be achieved without faith. In any event, this feeling of futility more seriously threatens the continuance of FEE's work than does any other discernible influence. People do not continue to work at a problem after its solution appears hopeless to them.

Too many opponents of socialism — once convinced that there is no simple remedy at hand, and aware that the problem at issue is nothing less than altering the *mores* of a vast society — tend to give up the ghost. Unnerved by the dimensions of the job, they say, "Oh, what's the use!"

The tale of two frogs, dumped into a can of milk, comes to mind. One frog, quick to concede the hopelessness of his situation, gave up and promptly drowned. The other frog was of sterner stuff:

So he kicked and splashed and he slammed  
and thrashed,  
And he kept on top through all;  
And he churned that milk in first-class shape  
In a great big butter ball.\*

Experience leads one to believe that the forces which have to do with shaping human destiny are of no help to those of little faith. Indeed, they appear to have no truck with

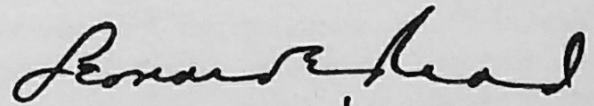
\*Day, Holman F. *Story of a Kicker*.

people who lack confidence in what determined effort can accomplish.

On the other hand, these forces — call them by your own name — tend to cooperate with those who believe they can accomplish the seemingly impossible and never call it quits until the game is over. There are men, be it observed, who do, in fact, move mountains. *But they are not the men who doubt that mountains can be moved.*

Take note, for instance, of golfers on putting greens. There are those who doubt they can sink any but the simplest putts. And there are those who have confidence that they can sink every putt — they actually believe this! The former are miserable performers. Among the latter are to be found the skilled and all the miracle putters.

Miracles are all about us — a common loaf of bread is packed with wonders. Those who have no sense of the miraculous, who have no faith in achieving anything beyond what the unaided individual can accomplish, will be of little help in ridding our society of socialism. The problem seems too hoplessly impossible to them and they quit. But the undaunted, those who know the magic of believing, will make progress, for the forces which are available to those who believe will lend a hand to multiply their efforts. Too bad there aren't more such efforts for them to multiply!



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